



RENEWED HEARTS, RENEWED SPIRITS, RENEWED PEOPLE

September 2022

This PDF is a simple printable document of FaithTides online, which can be found at faithtides.ca. Questions or comments can be sent to the editor at faithtides@bc.anglican.ca.

Asking the right questions



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While I am incredibly proud of how all our parishes have innovated and persevered through COVID-19, I am also hearing a common refrain about how, “We’re still not back to our pre-COVID-19 numbers.” I am aware that there is a certain amount of anxiety in the system about the future.

In *Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Christians*, Jeffrey D. Jones posits that when churches look at the issues of decline that are ubiquitous in our era, we are asking the wrong questions.

We ask, *How do we bring them in?*

When in fact we should be asking, **How do we send them out?**

We ask, *What should the clergy do?*

When in fact we should be asking, **What is our congregation’s shared ministry?**

We ask, *What’s our vision and how do we implement it?*

When in fact we should be asking, **What’s God up to and how do we get on board?**

We ask, *How do we survive?*

When really we should be asking, **How do we serve?**

We ask, *What are we doing to save people?*

When really we should be asking, **What are we doing to make the reign of God more present in this place?**

While these might not be the definitive questions we should be asking, I am sure that Jones is onto something here. For instance, so often I hear congregations ask, *How do we get more kids in Sunday school?* Perhaps we should instead be asking, **How do we meet the needs of the children in our community?** So many of our questions are focused on institutional maintenance and survival instead of on transformative love and service in the world.

The church is facing many perceived problems right now. In your parish, I invite you to step back for a moment and make sure your community is framing the issue in the right way — asking the right questions — for our answers and solutions are only as good as our questions.

Maybe the question isn’t how do we get more kids in Sunday school but what **new thing** is God calling us to do now that Sunday school is not taking up so much of our time, resources and physical space? Maybe the question is...

What are the needs of the children of this neighbourhood? Are they going to school hungry?

Do they need a safe place to be after school?

Do they need the joy of being part of a multi-generational community?

Do they need surrogate family?

Sunday school was birthed as a way to teach children who were working in factories to read. They were missing out on school during the week, so the church tried to make up for it on Sundays. The world, thankfully, has changed, and we need to change too.

As we begin a new church year, let us make sure we are asking the right questions. Let us be awake to what God is doing in our midst, what new opportunities and challenges are before us, and how we are called to faithfully respond.

Stepping aside after 42 years



Pictured (right) is Ansley Tucker, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral. Ansley will be retiring at the end of October. Photo courtesy of Ansley Tucker.

Ansley Tucker took up her role as rector of Christ Church Cathedral and Dean of Columbia in 2015, having previously served in the Diocese of Toronto for 25 years, and Calgary for ten.

She grew up in a nominally Christian family, and sometimes jokes that her devotion to the life of the Church represents a continuing break with parental authority and values. Following a degree in nursing, she pursued theological studies at Trinity College, Toronto, where she earned both an M.Div. and a Th.M., with a special interest in “the problem of evil,” and ethics.

Most of her ministry has been parish-based, ranging from a small town and a farming village to the downtown urban core, with congregations of varying political views, resources and understandings of church.

Her time at Christ Church Cathedral has offered many opportunities and challenges, including the church’s response to the Tent City encamped on the Court House lawn; coming alongside the community in times of civic sorrow and indignation; negotiating the ever-changing demands of COVID-19; serving as the diocesan administrator prior to the election and installation of Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee; encouraging the church to make an “outward turn” in its sense of purpose; and in

this regard, leading the cathedral community through an extensive visioning process, and re-igniting conversations about “Building for the Future.”

Below Ansley reflects on her time in ordained ministry:

Dr. Seuss asks, “How did it get so late so soon? It’s night before it’s afternoon. December is here before it’s June. My goodness how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?”

There are lots of reasons: but if you’re lucky, it’s because you were so engrossed in what you were doing, and taking such joy in it, that you simply didn’t notice the time fly. By this measure, I am lucky indeed. After 42 years of ordained ministry, the last seven here, I can hardly believe that the time has come to step aside.

It won’t be easy. Since I love what I do, it’s hard to imagine not doing it. I am still full of big ideas, and I’m still ruminating about big questions. I feel as if it is only now that I have the wisdom to equal the energy of my youth. This makes me more grateful than ever to have been entrusted with what we used to call “the cure of souls.” And I am grateful to all those people who smiled benignly and encouragingly as all my shiny new principles and certainties were tested and burnished in the crucible of real life.

Deaconed in 1980, and priested in 1981, I was amongst the first generation of women to be ordained in the Anglican Church of Canada. In practice, this meant — at least in the early days — that bishops and rectors and congregations were always taking a chance when they hired “a woman-priest.” (What a funny expression that was!) What we now take for granted was a huge adjustment for the whole Church, and without the advocacy and courage of many people, the whole experiment might well have failed. I don’t discount the fact that I had gifts to offer: but the point is that there were people around who made it their business to ask for them. People who were willing to create a place at the table for an untested, perhaps naively enthusiastic, incarnation of change.

And now it is time to do for others as has been done for me. Having enjoyed so many privileges of ministry, and a seat at so many tables, it is time to gratefully and

graciously contribute whatever sway I may yet have to clear a place at the table for a new generation of leaders. A generation with big ideas and ruminating about big questions. A generation who, please God, will bring the Church to rebirth.

Reflections on the music that shapes our faith and life



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On June 28, the Belfry Theatre in Victoria presented an interview with Michael Shamata, its artistic director, and Tobin Stokes, the composer and sound designer who recently completed the sound design for Pacific Opera's *Bon Appetit and the Italian Lesson*, and both the music and sound design for the Belfry's play *Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes*. Tobin was asked about the relationship between the composer and sound designer and the director of a play or opera. He said it always requires a two-way relationship. "However," he said, "it is essential that as the composer you understand yourself to be in the service of someone else's production."

In the same way, it is essential that those who offer the gift of music and song in the Christian liturgy act as those who are *in the service of someone else's production*. The purpose of music and song is to celebrate, give thanks and communicate the good news of God in Jesus Christ.

In his daily morning prayer, offered to his "garden

congregation" across the world during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Robert Willis, dean of Canterbury Cathedral, laid frequent emphasis on the ways in which music conveys the words of faith, whether in the form of psalms, hymns old and new or in oratorios such as Handel's *Messiah*. It is a particular gift to write and perform music that leaves the text to which it is an accompaniment sounding in our hearts and minds for hours afterwards.

Bruce Chatwin, in his book *Songlines*, explores the ways in which Australia's Aboriginal people recorded their history and geography and communicate with one another. Their songlines go back to their ancestors in dreamtime. Above all else, he says, the music in their songlines, a music that other Aboriginal people are able to access and understand, enables them "to map out their world." Arkady, an Australian colleague with deep experience of Aboriginal people in the outback says, "Music is a memory bank for finding one's way about the world."

A friend shared this family experience. The hymn *Eternal Father, Strong to Save (For Those in Peril on the Sea)* was sung on the occasion of her christening when her father was at sea with the merchant navy in World War II. It has always been important for her family, for her relationship with her father and for her faith. She would like it to be sung at her funeral. It has literally *mapped out her world*.

In a concert or opera, an audience listens to a performance. In contrast, in Christian liturgy there is a community participating in words enhanced by music as expressions of their living faith. The balance between a fine choir performance and a high level of participation in sung praise and thanksgiving by the congregation takes time and commitment to achieve. Where that kind of expression of Christian community is achieved it confers a foretaste of heavenly glory.

Women's Retreat a beautiful mosaic



After a two-year separation, the Women's Retreat was back in person under the direction of Clara Plamondon, archdeacon for Cowichan Mid-Vancouver Island region and incumbent at St Paul, Nanaimo. The theme was "We are the clay." We began by offering our feelings before God and taking some quiet time to nurture ourselves after being away from the community we hold so dear.

After greeting friends old and new — many of the friendships go back decades, to the early days of the retreat — we sat firmly with our feet on the floor, renewing our deep connection to the earth — the very earth from which we are raised. We are God's earthly vessels from the clay of these islands and inlets.

The opening of the retreat was a guided meditation based on Jeremiah 18. We were invited to go to the potter's house using all our senses, allowing ourselves to awaken to things we had not noticed before. "Be still and know what God is rising in you," said Clara.

After the guided meditation, there were various activities to engage in, including knitting, journaling, walking, colouring, reflecting and meditating, and each participant was able to enter into their own holy, sacred experience.

After 45 minutes we were called back to the circle and given a small tub of playdough and asked the question, "What do you think of when you think of clay?" Some words shared were durable, malleable, creative and imaginative.

Clay needs preparation before it can be worked, and that work takes time. Many felt that they were wobbly, knocked down, broken, marred and disturbed, much like the clay in the potter's house — but the story reminds us that we can try again. The pandemic in many ways was a challenge to start over. Clara shared the story of the piece of marble that was drilled and ruined until Michelangelo saw the stone and shaped it into the statue of David. The story reminds us that nothing is a lost cause.

The potter is still collaborating with us, picking up pieces and reworking the clay. Some pieces cannot go back together and we must find ways to accept this and respond to God's reshaping, refashioning and reforming. We are all God's earthly vessels.

Coming together in this one-day retreat was especially important as we are all broken pieces and together forming something new — a beautiful mosaic. Often, through community, we are made whole. The pandemic taught us what divisions there are in society and that we have work to do.

One thing we do know is that we are held in the palm of God's hand and that nothing can separate us from the love of God. God's hands are holding us, sustaining us, and though life can sometimes seem overwhelming, it is ok to be afraid and confused. It is often in these moments that we find our true purpose and our true authentic self. We should allow ourselves to open. God invites us to learn, to weep or dance. Every day we stand in vulnerability and God fills our vessel, showing us a way forward. We were asked, "What is our role in holding what is before us?" Prayer, trust and action. Relationship building in our communities. Responding to our faith.

In the closing Eucharist, we read from Mark 14. We recalled the story of the woman who poured perfume over Jesus from the broken alabaster jar, saturating Jesus' head and beard, loving him, anointing him and celebrating — we too are the rare, beautiful perfume ready to be poured out. We are just like the woman in Mark's gospel: all she had to offer was the gift of herself, a gesture of cracking herself open and pouring herself out with all that she had fashioned and shaped, despite the pushback and scorn she received. Our actions must speak our witness.

As we head back to our daily lives, we carry in our vessels

that sweet perfume ready to pour out, that we might participate in God's unfolding good work.

The fall Women's Retreat will take place Oct. 14–16 at St John the Baptist, Duncan. Accommodation for those needing it will be at Best Western Cowichan Valley Inn. The theme of the retreat is "Finding Hope in Liminal Times." Registration opens Sept. 1. For more information, visit the [diocesan website](#).

Treasure in earthen vessels



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Few questions are harder than asking, How do we serve as caretakers of broken institutions that, nonetheless, bear within them a healing treasure? While the church is not the only institution forced to grapple with this question, the church has a special obligation to contend with its own history of violence and betrayal. Why? Because, unlike most other institutions, it maintains, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." (II Corinthians 2:7; KJV) We maintain that we hold something divine in the midst of our all too human structures.

So, what exactly is that treasure, and what are the transient earthen vessels? If we could answer that question, perhaps we'd be willing to have those earthen vessels broken and fashioned afresh.

The trouble is that few Christians, across denominations or within them, could come to a consensus on where to draw that distinction between the essential and the transitory. What about our church buildings? Our liturgies? The episcopacy? Our theologies? What about the Bible itself? Are these the treasures or the earthen vessels? How do we decide?

But first, a more troubling but all too real possibility: if careful questioners decide that it's poison all the way down, then a rapid exit out the church door is an honest course of action. Many have made that call: generations of homophobia, exclusivist missionizing that seeks to erase religious diversity and even genocide have led many of good conscience to conclude that the church is beyond saving. Can we blame them?

As for those who chose to remain, we would be complicit in further violence if we attempted to padlock the churches' doors to prevent mass exodus. Any attempt to constrain people into remaining against their will would be both foolish and futile. It would also amount to an act of faithlessness: to believe in the power of the spirit must mean that we cannot imagine that She can be found within the walls of the church alone. We are best advised to repent and mourn, and entrust those who leave to the Holy who is, at any rate, not at our disposal. Given the levels of trauma suffered by many who are leaving, there is likely no coming back.

As for the rest of us, courageous discernment is the work of the hour. We stay because we still hope to discern treasure in this broken place. Only the metaphor of treasure in earthen vessels is far too neat for the task at hand. Perhaps the metaphor of distilling out what is lifegiving from a cocktail containing both poison and cure is more apt. Consider the following example: most Christians, myself included, place enormous confidence in the Bible as containing God's word. But we now recognize, to use Phyllis Trible's term, that the Bible contains many "texts of terror." There really are passages that can be read to authorize the subservience of women and the continuance of slavery, and that underwrite anti-Judaism. An uncritical trust in the Bible is dangerous and can lead to further abuse. Clearly, this business of finding the treasure is complex indeed.

Moreover, each of us may find the treasure in distinct

strands of our vast 2000-year-old global tradition. For me, the treasure rests in Christian tradition's confession that Jesus is the embodiment of divine love. Love became flesh and bone so that flesh and bone can become transfigured wholly into love. As the ancient church fathers and mothers put it: "God became human so that the human might become divine." That's the gospel in a nutshell for me. What is it for you? The tradition is vast and its resources multiple; my answer need not be yours.

Turning to Jesus' being and doing as the key to finding treasure, I am prepared to assess the whole of the tradition, even its most prized possessions, to see where it keeps faith with the Nazarene's table-turning justice-seeking love and where the tradition falls radically short. The church exists to keep his memory alive — "Do this in remembrance of me" — and to continue his work of embodying love. To be the body of Christ — that is our reason for existing; everything else is ancillary. Because I am claimed by this good news, I am not free to jettison it. It has hold of me, not the other way around. Everything else? Well, that is a matter of hard-nosed and painful negotiation.

Might we need to surrender our church buildings? Many communities have already been forced to do so. Will it mean revising our liturgies? Theologians and liturgists within the Episcopal church have [recently crafted](#) a new Good Friday liturgy that seeks to remove the older version's anti-Judaism. Interreligious theologians are already at work doing just that. Extend God's love to more-than-human creatures and not just human beings; ecotheologians are on it.

A final note: there is something shortsighted about imagining that leavers and remainers are just individuals making personal choices like consumers in the marketplace picking one brand over another. Cultural shifts, economic pressures on families in which both partners have to work and complicated histories of wounding and healing are also at work.

Still, those who stay seek to claim a treasure that we are claimed by; we do not know ourselves apart from that treasure. We cannot bring ourselves to jettison the church despite its egregious and wounding history — not because we are uncritical loyalists but because we are claimed by a love that will not let us go. In the name of that love, we

hope to topple every idol that would possess and disfigure our souls, whether those idols are housed inside the church walls or outside it.

To be clear, those who leave do so also in the name of love if not basic decency; their outrage too is fueled by ethical fire. Their leaving too is not just a matter of individual decision making but a matter of being claimed by moral urgency or the elemental impulse to survive. The decisive question is whether those who stay might recognize those who have left as prophetic voices whose pain and passion often give them laser-like vision to spot the sacred cows to which we insiders still stubbornly cling. Our very survival depends on our capacities to listen and learn lest we repeat the violent traumas of the past.

This piece was written in conversation with Kate Newman.

Diocesan Council invests in diocesan property



*The interior of Christ Church Cathedral showing the main altar.
Photo courtesy of Ian Alexander.*

Diocesan Council (DC) held its June meeting in the nave of the cathedral, a splendid and inspiring venue for important conversation and decision making.

DC made three key decisions. A property redevelopment fund was created to assist parishes considering initiatives for parish property. The diocese has a lot of property that

needs to be maintained but we also need to think about how our property can serve the communities in which we live. Proposals will be submitted to the asset management advisory team (chaired by Bob Brandle), before going on to DC for a final decision. Funds will be made available by loan or grant.

A management committee was created comprised of DC members. This committee can meet on short notice and deal with time sensitive matters of diocesan operation. A management committee also frees up time for DC to do the work of governance and more regularly consider broader matters of diocesan life.

DC committed the diocese to contributing \$100,000 to Building for the Future. This expense is an investment in our most valuable physical asset, the cathedral precinct, and will help to develop a sustainable plan for future development on the site. More information on this initiative can be viewed on the [cathedral website](#).

Reimagining who we are called to be

Where were you born and where did you grow up?

I grew up in Ladysmith and I spent much of my childhood exploring forest floors and ocean shores and could often be found watching the beauty of the night sky. These early moments in creation were my first



Photo courtesy of Kirsten Evenden

introductions to the God that is bigger and more wonderful than I could imagine, well before I began going to church.

While I did move to Ontario for a few years after getting married, it didn't take long for my husband and I to move back west. Currently, we live in Nanaimo, where we enjoy tending to our garden and working on projects around our home. I can often be found behind the shutter of my camera as we continue to explore the beauty of island living.

What studies have you done and what route did you take for your studies?

In the summer of 2019, I began my Master of Divinity as a distance student at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax. This program allowed me to integrate my learning with practical ministry experience and allowed me to stay connected to the life and work of this diocese while I continued my studies. This coming year I will be working on my thesis project and, God willing, will graduate in spring of 2023.

Can you tell us a bit about your career within the Anglican church so far?

When I was about 16, I found my way to St John, Ladysmith. I was quickly invited to be a youth delegate to Synod and served on Diocesan Council that same year. Over the years I have led Sunday school, served as a youth worker and written Vacation Bible School (VBS) programs for the diocese. I have attended more synods and conferences than I would care to admit and even served as a warden for three years. I became active in the Anglican Cursillo community in 2013 and have served on the music ministry team at Cursillo weekends since that time. I have also been on various diocesan committees over the years, most recently within the Intersections dialogue series.

Did you pursue another career previously?

My previous work was in employment services, both as a workshop developer/facilitator and as an employment counselor. Before starting seminary, I also spent a few years working for the provincial government as a front line worker for the Ministry of Social Development and

Poverty Reduction with people on disability and income assistance.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?

One moment that always sticks out for me happened in August 2007 when my husband and I were hired to be the diocesan VBS leaders and ran our program in 10 churches across the diocese. Most weeks we had between four to 15 children each day. However, that all changed when we arrived at St Columba, Port Hardy. We were set up and ready for registration and were expecting maybe 10 participants. Within half an hour we had over 35 children present and more trickled in as the week progressed. While it wasn't as we had planned and took some creative and quick thinking, it was such a joyful experience, filled with laughter, song, gratitude and community — it still stands out to me today as a wonderful example of being the Church in the community.

What do you see as the greatest challenge in the Anglican church?

Through our baptismal covenant, we are called to live out the gospel and to find ways to make the love of an invisible God visible in the world. So, for me, the greatest challenge is seeking ways to make the patterns and rhythms of the traditions of our church vibrant, alive and relevant in today's world, especially as we continue to reimagine who we are called to be as people of faith in a post-pandemic world.

What would your ideal posting look like?

For me an ideal posting would be within a community that is not afraid to explore, experiment and try new things as we discern where the spirit is calling us and rediscover who we are as people of faith.

What was the most unusual sermon you have ever heard?

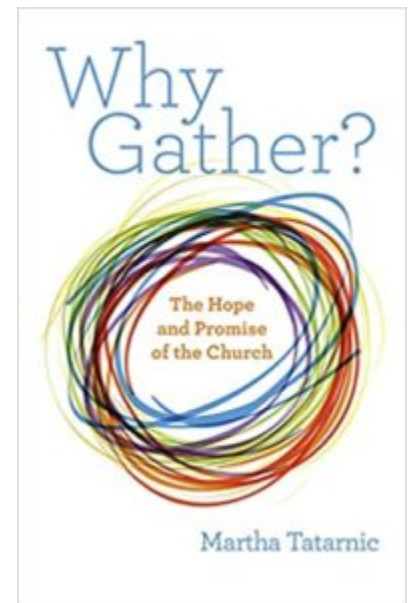
One sermon that stands out for me was shared by a musician. He had the song *Under Pressure* by Queen playing in the background while he spoke. He ended the sermon by playing *Amazing Grace* on his violin above the recording to demonstrate the grace of God that runs through our lives amidst the pressures of life. It was

moving and beautiful and introduced me to more creative approaches to preaching the word and sharing the good news with the community.

What the church has to offer a world in spiritual crisis

Book Review: Why Gather? The Hope and Promise of the Church by Martha Tatarnic. New York, NY, Church Publishing, 2022.

Why Gather? is both the title and the central question at the heart of Martha Tatarnic's latest book. Tatarnic is the incumbent at St George, St Catharines in the Anglican Diocese of Niagara and she has previously published on what the Christian tradition has to say about food and the way we eat. In her latest book, Tatarnic explores why gathering as part of a church and congregation still matters, particularly in the context of a church in decline.



The book is heavily informed by the COVID-19 pandemic and indeed it opens in the early days of March 2020. Tatarnic is days away from a planned and much longed-for trip to Jerusalem but is forced to cancel because of COVID-19. Up until that point, Tatarnic had been convinced, as so many of us were back then, that this whole thing would blow over. Even as schools and business began to shutter, Tatarnic and others in her church talked of being able to gather again in a matter of weeks or months. But, as we know, that was not what

happened. Instead, the pandemic upended all our lives in ways and for a length of time few, except perhaps some hand-wringing epidemiologists, could have predicted.

Tatarnic describes the pandemic as a wilderness period, both for herself as a priest and for the church, but she points out that “[w]hat looks like the wild and wandering circumstances that never would have been our choosing is actually terrain that is ripe for finding out who we really are.” Tatarnic admits that she had been feeling burnout for a long time before COVID-19 but in being forced to stay put and not get on a plane to Jerusalem, Tatarnic found herself at a bargaining table with God and that she was “putting stuff on that table that hadn’t felt up for grabs for a long time.” Among that “stuff” was her calling as a priest.

At the same time, a church that had been in decline for decades and had been wrestling with some big topics, such as Indigenous reconciliation and self-determination and marriage equality, found itself forced to shutter its doors. And yet, at the same time, churches were deemed “essential” — a label that allowed many to continue offering worship with a skeleton crew through livestreaming services. The pandemic and the designation of churches as “essential,” Tatarnic argues, have promoted many in the church to ask questions that should have been asked before: “Why gather in Jesus’ name at all? Why does the church even matter...?”

While many churches may be able to offer ready answers to these questions in the form of their outreach activities, Tatarnic believes that the decision by the bishops of Ontario to suspend the Eucharist exemplifies the “story of how what we do only matters for ourselves.” And yet, argues Tatarnic, many of the issues that outreach tries to tackle and that the church has been grappling with, and indeed the big crises that we as humanity face, are, in fact, the result of a spiritual crisis or “a disconnection from key spiritual truths.” Tatarnic asks:

If we believe... that God really is concerned with the health and healing of the whole Earth, not merely the survival of the institutional church, what is the church doing if it isn’t on board with proclaiming the message of God’s saving help for us all?

As for Tatarnic and her own pandemic reckoning, in the

end, she admits, there was no lightning bolt, nor even a quiet voice from God. Instead, Tatarnic quotes the words of Peter when Jesus asks the Twelve Disciples if they will abandon him: “Where else will we go? You have the words of eternal life.” She describes Peter’s response and her own realization that there are no “escape hatches” as a sigh. It also, Tatarnic argues, points to the fact that “we’re infected with one another.”

What the pandemic showed us, is that even with all the measures taken, all the handwashing and mask wearing and staying at home, we only ever managed to slow the virus’s spread, not stop it. Where else can we go if we are always and everywhere breathing the same air as others around us?

What this “infection” points to, Tatarnic believes, is an important truth about why the church matters. We are inextricably connected, which means that we also need one another: “We need one another to know and love Jesus. We need the community of faith and the stories of how God has been at work in actual, real lives... in order to love and serve God.”

In the book, Tatarnic goes on to examine what she calls “the ultrareal of the church.” “Ultrareal” is a term Tatarnic first came to in the context of running. It is a mindset in which the runner sees and embraces the reality of the situation they are in. Tatarnic gives as an example the weather. While we may grumble about the rain, we can also acknowledge that it is cooling and refreshing. Importantly, this isn’t about adopting a positive mindset, it is about seeing what is really there, it is about *fact*.

The ultrareal of the church, as Tatarnic sees it, is that “faith still happens.” What’s more, it still happens among — and the church is still served by — people who have been woefully failed by the church, including Indigenous Peoples and LGBTQ2+ communities. The ultrareal of the church is that our differences and divisions are here to stay. The ultrareal of the church is that it is a flawed institution and that its members are flawed and imperfect too, but that “the flaws are kind of the point.” The ultrareal of the church is that Jesus shows up for people differently. The ultrareal of the church is that it offers an answer to the spiritual crisis, it offers a way to connect to one another and to connect humanity to God. The ultrareal of the church is that we cannot eliminate difference or

build fences and gates to keep out those we deem not to belong.

In the third part of the book, Tatarnic looks at how God is revealed through communities of faith. She says that while ultrarealism helps us to see and accept who we are, the next step is to see the grace of God in the “mess and fragility and heartbreak, not in spite of it.” Tatarnic recounts stories of how God’s grace is revealed through death, through suffering, through the worst experiences of our lives, in the moments when everything seems to be falling apart. In those moments, she writes, “God doesn’t leave us helpless... Gods sets us up so that we live our faith in community, we seek God together.”

In the fourth and final section of the book, Tatarnic addresses the question of whether ultrarealism might mean that the church isn’t going to change:

To say that the church needs to get real about who we are instead of always focusing on who we wish we could be is not to say that we aren’t also on a path of how we seek to be better, how we hold ourselves to account, how we look for and call out where change is needed.

Indeed, Tatarnic believes that becoming an inclusive church will necessitate allowing ourselves to be changed. She gives the example of churches trying to attract young families, in order to secure the future of their church. What inevitably happens, says Tatarnic, is that when parishioners find themselves worshipping to the sound of crying babies and shouting toddlers, they realise that while they might want young families to join in principle, they are not necessarily prepared for the ways in which those families will change the life of the church.

Why Gather? isn’t about giving the church permission to give up — “I want us to fight for a better future” — but it is a rallying cry to see and embrace the truth of what is in front of us and to embrace what the church has to offer a world and a society in spiritual crisis. The book is packed with engaging human stories, including Tatarnic’s own story of her personal struggles with the central question of the book. Tatarnic also writes in clear and concise prose that is sure to appeal not just to Anglicans but to anyone interested in the question of whether and why the church still matters.

Q&A with Martha Tatarnic

Martha Tatarnic is the incumbent at St George, St Catharines in Ontario and is the author of Why Gather?: The Hope and Promise of the Church, which published with Church Publishing in June this year. You can read a review of Why Gather? in the September 2022 issue of Faith Tides. Below, Faith Tides editor Naomi Racz talks to Martha Tatarnic about writing a book during a pandemic and the future of the Church.

Q: One of the things that struck me is that you say you started the book in 2018, before the pandemic. But the pandemic feels very central to the book and it seems like it informed the ideas that you explore in the book. I was wondering, what did that book in 2018 look like? How did it change as you were writing it and living through the pandemic? Would it have been a very different book, do you think, without the pandemic?

A: Yes, I’m sure it would’ve been. I think that the pandemic brought a lot of things to light in a way that was hard to turn away from. When I started writing the book, as I note, it came out of a conversation around faith with my son and my answer to him was to stay close to the Church, which seemed to require, in my own mind, some justification.

I think that for any of us who have served in the mainline church for any length of time, we’ve kind of been steeped in the question of the church’s survival. I’ve never really lived in a church where that hasn’t been the case. The institutional church has been in decline longer than I’ve been alive. And so, the initial question back in 2018 was why we might want to stay close to the Church anyway. How does the community of faith help me to be a believer? And why does that matter?

Well, all of a sudden with COVID-19 happening, with all of our normal patterns of church suspended, and the needs of the world very urgently defined, it seemed like those answers needed to be a lot more thoughtful and a lot more responsive, not just to us as individuals, but to us as a

world in crisis.

Q: What I'm hearing is that a lot of churches are saying their in-person numbers are not what they were before the pandemic. So it also seems like it's something that's precipitated that decline even further. Although, it has also opened up in some ways. A lot of churches are seeing online participants coming from further afield or who wouldn't have been able to attend before. So it's kind of interesting that there's this dynamic there as well.

A: Well, that changes the nature of community and it changes the ways in which we learn from one another in that walk of faith. It certainly demands a lot of questions around how we create authentic community online where there is something more than just consumer choice at work, that we're invited to learn and grow and serve and offer as well, even if we're not in person. I think everybody would say that the institutional decline that we've seen for decades was very much heightened by COVID-19.

Q: You have this idea in the book that we're infected with one another. Was that an idea that came out of the pandemic or is that something you were kind of aware of and it just gave you this useful metaphor to talk about it?

A: I guess I would say yes and yes. My previous book is called *The Living Diet* and it talks about our relationship with food and our bodies. And, I sort of hammer away at, throughout that book, that eating is an active relationship. We cannot, as bodies in this world, exist without taking in life from outside of ourselves, into our bodies. It's not a spiritual statement; that's a biological statement. And it's a statement that is reinforced every time we put food in our bodies.

So that's definitely a premise that I've been very aware of for a long time. And I think it informs a lot about how we understand not just our relationship with our bodies and food, but also the threads through scripture around eating and around knowing God and knowing God's love as a meal or a banquet or food, and Jesus' choice of using food to describe his own life.

But, definitely, then the pandemic gave me another angle

on that language, because I very quickly realized, nobody's talking about stopping the spread of COVID-19. Those horses are out of the barn because once it gets into our airstream it's out there. The air is going to circulate this thing all across the globe. All we could talk about was flattening the curve because we're infected with each other. I am currently breathing in air that somebody else has breathed out. That is just a biological premise.

Q: There's this really vivid scene in your book where you describe the Eucharist and people gathering together and how horrifying it seems now that you drink from this cup that is full of backwash and crumbs. And you say you don't know if we'll ever go back to that necessarily. But do you see positive changes that are coming out of that? Not just, you know, we're losing numbers, we're losing practice, but positive ways that it's changed the Church?

A: Yes, I hope that those positive ways are very evident in the book. But I think it is essential that we move away from the question of mere survival to the question of why it matters at all. When I first got the copies of the manuscript from my publisher, they had a typo on every single page because rather than the title of the book saying "Why Gather?" every single page said "Why Bother?" That's the question, right? Why bother? Who cares if we all just enjoy the Anglican club. That's not something I'm going to devote my life to, propping up people's hobbies. But what is the essential offering of the Church to the world? That's a really interesting question, a way more life-giving question than just survival. And I do think that that suspension of our regular patterns of gathering in worship put into sharp relief why it matters to us; why bother?

Q: Could you just explain ultrarealism and how you went about applying it — you talk about it being a running concept — how you went about applying that to the church. Those seem like quite different things.

A: I came across the concept through long distance running, but it is a mental fitness technique rather than an exercise technique. So it is the act of seeing, accepting and embracing what is actually happening rather than getting freaked out about what might happen or what you wish were different.

So, in running, it's easy to start out running and feel like, I wish it weren't raining and I wish I didn't have this cramp in my side and I think I have to pee and I have only run one kilometre and I have 29 to go. How am I going to do this? And I feel tired already. You can just be done before you even start because you can completely talk yourself in circles. But if you really focus on what is actually happening... So right now, I'm running and it's okay. That is a powerful technique in terms of any endurance sport. I think there's a clear metaphor there for just being a human being, right?

How much time do we devote to wishing or worrying? It's like that "live in the moment" hashtag. But in terms of the life of the Church, again, as somebody who's been steeped in the institutional decline of the church my whole life, I just think we spend so much time lamenting that we're not different and wishing that we had people that we don't have and wishing that we had buildings that we don't have and wishing and worrying about what's next. That's not a really compelling invitation for people to check us out.

"We want more young people" is not really an exciting invitation to anybody. But apply that ultrarealism to the life of the Church. Well, what's happening right now is here's a gathering of people who have been touched by God in some pretty profound ways and have incredible stories of transformation and hope and generosity and service and love. That's why they're there. What's happening right now, that's a pretty important thing to see and then to embrace and to offer.

Q: You do have an answer to this question of "Why Gather?" but you certainly say that you're not there to offer concrete solutions or do X, Y, Z, and suddenly you'll have a flourishing church. What really struck me is that each chapter ends with this list of questions. And I think I have walked away from reading it with a lot of thoughts mulling around. Was that your intention? Were you conscious of doing that with the book, that it was going to prompt a lot of questioning rather than just laying out answers?

A: Yes. I would be really nervous to advertise myself as somebody who has all the answers. And also, as somebody who has spent my whole life in the mainline church, my experience of religion is not one of, you know,

here's all of the black and white answers. And if you do all of these things and don't do all of these things, then your soul will be saved and you'll go to heaven and too bad about all the other people. That is not my experience of religion at all.

My experience of religion is very much about that faith community that discerns and questions and shares and collaborates and wonders. And the inquiring and discerning hearts that we talk about in the prayer of baptism, that is my experience of religious community. So it would be really out of character for me to write a book promising answers.

I do think that if there is a conclusion in the book, it is very much that those stories of how our lives have been touched and transformed by God need to be lifted up and shared. And that that blesses the world around us in a whole bunch of pretty beautiful ways. I do think that that witness of community, of embracing the infection, of embracing the reality that we're stuck with one another is a really important counterpoint to a lot of the most urgent crises in front of us as humanity.

Because I think if you look at the environmental crisis, if you look at the opioid crisis, if you look at Black Lives Matter and Truth and Reconciliation and all of the most urgent questions in front of us right now, you can boil them all back to trying to live outside of the relationship for which we're created, trying to live outside of that basic responsibility to one another and the basic premise that we can't have life without tending to all the life around us.

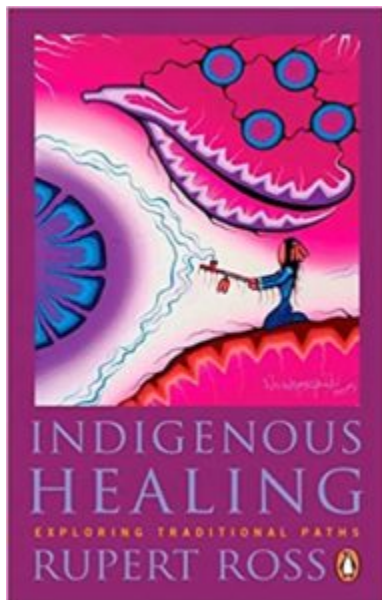
Interconnection and healing from colonization

Book Review:

**Indigenous Healing:
Exploring Traditional
Paths by Rupert Ross.
Toronto, Penguin
Canada, 2014.**

After hearing Martin Brokenleg, a priest and prominent psychologist specializing in Indigenous trauma and resilience, recommend this book, I ordered it and was surprised to find that it's written by a retired assistant Crown attorney, who is non-Indigenous. Ross is also the author of two previous books on related topics and writes with humility, empathy and insight into this challenging area. The book has three parts: 1) Stumbling into a World of Right Relations, 2) Colonization and 3) Healing from Colonization. In his introduction, Ross writes that he hopes to set a stronger tone of mutual respect for greater understanding in the ongoing truth and reconciliation process.

In Part 1, Ross first deals with relational justice. In 1992 Ross had been seconded to the Aboriginal Justice Directorate and assigned "to explore the aboriginal assertion that, for them, justice was primarily a healing activity, not one of vengeance or retribution." After attending some sweat lodges, Ross learned the importance of a focus on "All my relations" — indicating that everything is interconnected. Ross found that offenders often seemed indifferent to how their actions impacted others and needed to be shown that connection. He came to understand that "seeing relationally" meant looking at how the crime came out of all the offender's relationships, and in turn affected those relationships. In the third chapter of Part 1, called "Moving into Right Relations,"



Ross addresses Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices and how they intersect with notions of justice. I thoroughly enjoyed the teachings here and learned a great deal about these interconnected areas. I too have attended sweat lodges (with the Tla'amin Nation) and was in awe at being told that the steam from the rocks was the breath of our ancestors.

Part 2 on "Colonization" was the most painful part of the book, and rightly so, given the pain that Indigenous Peoples have experienced, especially through Canada's residential school system. Chapter 4 deals with the many sources of harm and covers topics including "Diseases," "The Denigration of Women and their Roles," "Legal Discrimination" and "Relocation of Families and Communities." The book then moves more directly into a focus on residential schools in Chapter 5. Ross starts with the provocatively difficult first section entitled "The Children Were Prisoners, Not Just Students." Ross then extrapolates on this theme and details the abandonment, poverty, disease, denigration and abuse that the children suffered from. Like many others, I've read plenty of stories from residential school survivors over the years, but Ross presents this material in a particularly compelling way.

Chapter 6 moves on to explore the psychological damage inflicted on Indigenous Peoples and the ways this damage manifests itself through PTSD, emotional suppression, shame and alcohol and drug abuse disorders. The section on "Learned Helplessness" was especially helpful as Ross cites various psychologists to help explain how the experience of residential schools, where a child's needs, fears and concerns were either ignored or punished, can make people or groups become passive, inactive and hostile. The last two chapters of Part 2 deal with the experience of residential school survivors once they returned home, as well as the impact of the Sixties Scoop and incarceration. Michelle Good's multi-award-winning 2020 book *Five Little Indians* is much more understandable to me now after reading Ross's "Going Home" section. The forces aligned against these older teenagers after leaving the immense trauma of residential schools is a complex knot of intertwined and often overwhelming challenges. And the "Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" section includes a focus on intergenerational trauma — a topic that Dr. Brokenleg has taught and written on extensively.

Part 3, called “Healing from Colonization,” begins with an appropriately humble chapter on “How to Begin.” Then Chapter 10 looks at three specific healing programs: the Hollow Water Community Holistic Circle Healing Program, the National Native Alcohol and Drug Addiction Program (NNADAP) and the Redpath program. Ross describes these three programs not as ends in themselves, but rather as important examples of the ways that traditional Indigenous healing ideas can be incorporated as further programs are developed. The last chapter (11) provides examples of Indigenous approaches to healing, including group healing, restoring the emotional realm, ceremonies, respecting the worth of everyone and the role of land in healing.

Then Ross writes a beautiful conclusion, including stories of his own awkward attempts and failures to live up to his goals of learning and incorporating many aspects of Indigenous healing into his own life and work. In reading this excellent book, and despite how overwhelming the details were at times, I cherish especially the idea of finding our place as part of the interconnected web of all beings. This idea is so important for the Earth’s survival. To me, this book on Indigenous healing had so much to say about how all of us need to live in a more respectfully sacrificial way on Mother Earth, conscious of how all our actions have an interconnected impact for good or ill. So let us choose wisely!

The first day

It is early September 1933 and it has been decreed that I, on the cusp of five years old, should go to school. The great day comes. Fully equipped with pencil, eraser and slim notebook in which to draw, my mother and I set out for the parish school, only a short walk away.

Up the hill we go, in through a heavy iron gate, across a wide playground and into the school porch. My mother knocks on the schoolroom door, and Miss Buckley comes out. In that single moment, I am transformed from being a small and, for the most part, obedient boy with neatly combed hair and, so I am told, a cherubic countenance, into a bawling, wriggling, threshing creature whose cries,

beginning as moans, increase to shrieks. I can only imagine my mother’s horror as she vainly tries to quiet this small fiend that has replaced her usually docile son.

Miss Buckley — Eleanor was her Christian name — stands calmly for a few minutes, watching this histrionic performance. Actually, as she does so, I will take the opportunity to describe her as she is remembered — with much appreciation and affection — across all of nine decades.

She is tall, nay, statuesque. After all, who is not statuesque to a small boy? Her hair is immaculately formed in a gleaming brown chignon. She has spectacles that have delicate gold chains from frame to ear, with matching gold earrings. Speaking of matching, on her wrist, complete with tiny lace handkerchief, is a gold watch. Her dress is a deep loden green, her graceful court shoes a rich brown.

In a moment chosen from long experience, Miss Buckley decides to end this tantrum, familiar to her from countless similar performances. Turning to my mother and speaking very quietly and calmly, she says, “Now Mrs. O’Driscoll, I think you may go home. Herbert and I will get along very well together.” My mother, wishing to be anywhere but in the presence of this small demon who had possessed her son, flees. Years later she told me that she was no further than the gate of the school property before my howls stopped abruptly. She did not dare to imagine how Miss Buckley had achieved this transformation.

We are left together in the small porch. Two things happen next. As with generations of screaming children on the first day of school, I realize the uselessness of my protest. Miss Buckley takes my hand and leads me into the schoolroom and across to a small desk in the front row. There I sit, my sobs slowly subsiding as she brings me the one thing in the world I am coming to desire — large slim books with coloured pictures. From that day forth there is not a protest or cry of any kind. I have discovered the world of school and find it magical.

However, if truth be told, I think I had also begun to fall in love with Miss Buckley. After all, how else would her memory remain so shimmeringly clear across nine decades?

GVAT assembly aims to have impact on housing crisis

Greater Victoria Acting Together is an organization that brings together faith communities, non-profit organizations and labour unions to fight for the common good in our region. We have been actively preparing for a momentous assembly on Oct. 2 that will see our valued member organizations come together in person for the first time to demonstrate our collective power to the broader community. We are so excited to see you there! The diocese is pleased to be a partner in this initiative and has offered Christ Church Cathedral as the venue for this event.

Everyone deserves a home within their community. Together, **we will be making a meaningful impact on the deepening housing crisis** that is touching so many people in our communities, from people experiencing homelessness to young families, workers, students and seniors. Without a home, it is nearly impossible to tend to other needs.

Municipalities play an important role in facilitating non-profit and affordable housing. This election, GVAT is asking mayoral candidates in the region to embrace a human rights approach to housing, and to lead by committing to bold policies that preserve and create new non-profit and affordable housing for all of our neighbours.

Leading up to the election, we'll be building and

demonstrating public support for these policies through an endorsement campaign. **The assembly is where we stand to make the greatest impact in opening up affordable and non-profit housing opportunities in the region, but only if enough of us show up.** So, we need your help.

On Oct. 2, we need to come together in big numbers to show mayoral candidates that there is strong support for local governments in the region to champion bold policies to accelerate development of non-profit and affordable housing.

At the assembly, we'll be asking mayoral candidates to commit to specific actions from within our overarching housing vision, including:

- Prioritizing a housing first approach
- Facilitating and investing in expedited delivery of thousands of new non-profit and affordable housing units in the region.
- Protecting tenants in low-cost rentals and existing affordable rental stocks

There is more information on GVAT's housing campaign [here](#).

We want to ensure we have the most successful event possible. That means hundreds of people at Christ Church Cathedral showing up in solidarity for our asks of the candidates. It is our best chance to grow our community and our voice. As the host for this event, we would love to have a strong showing from our parishes on Sunday, Oct. 2, 7–8:30 p.m.

If you have questions or want more information, please contact [Brendon Neilson](#) who is our delegate to GVAT.